

## ANNAMITE CIVILIZATION

L Oriental problem from a wholly Occidental viewpoint. The Annamite seems enigmatic because he is perfectly natural—a phenomenon so unusual that it appears complicated. There is no such thing as privacy in the Far East. The Annamites live in the fields all day, and at night their houses cannot be closed against intrusion or even the gaze of the passer-by. Moreover, years of Confucianist training and pruning have solved the Annamite into a type character. If one succeeds in understanding a single *nhaque*, or peasant, one understands them all. Geographic and historical factors have been, as always, the two major influences on native character. The climate exhausts the nerves and stimulates the circulation of blood in such a way that the Annamites live more quickly than men who dwell in temperate zones.<sup>1</sup> Few Annamites live to be more than sixty years old: they are adults at the age of thirteen, fathers at sixteen, and old men at fifty. The Tonkinese, thanks to their invigorating climate, show more energy and initiative than the other Annamites. The Annamite nervous system is certainly less sensitive than that of Occidentals. There is a significant lack of comfort in even the homes of the wealthy. Clothes reveal the same disdain. Their colour is drab at the outset, and their general negligence is increased by layers of dirt and betel-chewing. Native methods of eating show a similar indelicacy. There is absolutely no thought of the body's beauty, and they have a great shame of the nude. Exercise is scorned as a sign of poverty: it is inconceivable to them that anyone who might ride would walk for pleasure. This apathy, insensitivity, and placidity are certainly grounded on them by the climate and under-nourishment. Their extraordinary ordinary resistance to suffering, their endurance bred by hard work in

te rice-fields, their cruelty and their fatalism—all are  
 attuned to a  
 chief that self-control is the highest expression of  
 human dignity.  
 They lack the driving power given by strong desires  
 and needs.  
 Generous impulses have been reduced by the climate,  
 by social discipline,  
 line, and by a paternalistic state to an exclusively  
 family and local  
 jingoism. The famous tolerance of the Orient is largely  
 dislike of effort.  
 There is nothing beyond sensibility and the begetting of  
 children. There  
 is no compassion for those outside the groups to which  
 one belongs,  
 and even within them those who have contagious diseases  
 are mercilessly  
 driven out. They accept the principle of authority and  
 group responsibility  
 so completely that they never even question, or  
 try to mitigate,  
 the most cruel of legal penalties. The indifference of the  
 Annamites to  
 their compatriots' sufferings is unbelievable\*

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Paul Giran, *Psychology of the Annamite* (Paris,  
 1904), p. 25.